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E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/11/2017
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [KPAL](#) [KWPB](#) [EG](#) [IS](#)
SUBJECT: ISA CHIEF DISKIN OPPOSED TO BENCHMARKS, PROPOSES
"STARTING SMALL" IN NABLUS

Classified By: Ambassador Richard H. Jones. Reasons: 1.4 (b)(d).

[¶1.](#) (S) SUMMARY: In a June 11 discussion of the security situation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip (septel), Israeli Security Agency (ISA) Head Yuval Diskin told Ambassador Jones he personally opposes the benchmarks, viewing them as "a very dangerous plan" that could be easily agreed upon by Israeli and Palestinian negotiators, but impossible to implement, with deadly consequences for Israel. Diskin stressed that he had and would continue to advise the government against accepting the benchmarks. He explained that, in the ISA's analysis, the Palestinian people are not ready to see the benchmark obligations implemented, and that Palestinian Authority (PA) President Abbas and his security forces are neither capable nor willing to follow through on their responsibilities. Moving forward on the benchmarks in such a situation would only saddle Israel with unacceptable security risks and expose it to terrorist attacks. The Ambassador explained that the benchmarks had been designed to be sequenced with easier actions up front. The idea was to build a record of success before moving onto the difficult steps. No one expected Israel to take all the steps without matching efforts on the Palestinian side.

[¶2.](#) (S) SUMMARY, CONT. In an apparently sincere effort to provide an alternative way ahead, Diskin suggested instead that the Palestinians be urged to demonstrate a desire to impose security in a select West Bank location where they had the means to do so (e.g., Nablus) for a period of time. If the Palestinians were able to do this, then Diskin said he would be able to convince the Israeli government to respond in a comparable way, thereby building confidence on both sides. Stressing that such confidence building measures should start out small, he observed that efforts had been made in the past to get fugitives in Nablus to promise not to carry out violent activity, surrender their arms to Palestinian security forces, and remain in one location. This, he suggested, would be an activity that should not be beyond the abilities of the Palestinian security forces, and could help build confidence between the Israeli and Palestinian sides. The key to success was strong high-level political support on the Palestinian side, which so far had been lacking. END SUMMARY.

[¶3.](#) (S) Diskin said that he wanted to be perfectly clear that he is "totally against" the benchmarks. He said he had conveyed his strong opposition to them to USSC LTG Dayton shortly after they were shared with the Israeli side. Diskin said that he sees the benchmarks as a "very dangerous plan": "I know where you are going with these, and that you want to accomplish something by the end of the year through negotiations. This is a positive idea, but implementation of the benchmarks would lead to disaster." Diskin explained

that it would be easy for Israeli and Palestinian negotiators to reach a political agreement in the confines of meeting rooms abroad. Everybody, he claimed, already understands the formula for a final agreement. The problem, he stressed, is that the Palestinian people (the "street") are not ready for such an agreement: "Nothing has changed in the Palestinian street. If the benchmarks were agreed upon and led to a declaration of principles by the end of the year, this in itself would be fine. But you would have a gap between the negotiating teams and 'the street,' and this would create a crisis. You cannot build confidence when you do not have a strong partner on the other side." Diskin stressed that in Israel's assessment, Palestinian Authority President Abbas and his security apparatus are not functioning in the West Bank or the Gaza Strip. The Palestinians would not be in a position to implement their obligations under the benchmarks.

Israel, he said, would be required to assume all the risks that would ensue: "How can I assume all the risks that would come from the lifting of roadblocks and the opening of passages between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank? I cannot." The Ambassador explained that the benchmarks had been designed to be sequenced with easier actions up front. The idea was to build a record of success before moving onto the difficult steps. No one expected Israel to take all the steps without matching efforts on the Palestinian side.

14. (S) As a way ahead, Diskin suggested that the Israeli and Palestinian sides focus their effort on one area, and try to make progress there before tackling other issues. As an example, he raised Nablus. Describing Nablus as a particularly problematic city for Israel -- from which numerous terrorist attacks and attempts have originated -- Diskin suggested that if the Palestinians took responsibility for security in Nablus, which they were capable of doing, this would be a start. Diskin lamented, however, that the

Palestinian leadership apparently is afraid or unwilling to do this. He recounted that Palestinian businessmen had told him that Abbas does not want to do anything to upset the current situation, and that the Palestinian security forces currently in Nablus are unwilling to assert themselves, knowing that they will not get backup if they need it.

15. (S) Visibly frustrated, Diskin said, "Let the Palestinians carry out the first confidence building measure. Then I could remove roadblocks and free up travel." He reiterated that Nablus and Ramallah are strategically the most important cities in the West Bank for Israel. Fatah, he said, should focus on the West Bank, and "make it blossom." In contrast, Diskin stressed that Israel does not want to press Abbas to put forces in Rafah or the northern Gaza Strip: "He will not do it anyway, so why ask? He could put forces in the West Bank that would be backed up by our security umbrella. After all, we already have our forces there. Let us see them take some responsibility in Nablus and start fighting anarchy there." Diskin said that Israel could sign onto an agreement concerning fugitives who are hiding in Nablus: "If they stop attacking us, we can stop chasing them. We have tried this before. The method is simple. You get a promise from each fugitive that he will not attack us, and then you have him turn his gun over to the security forces." Diskin said that previous attempts to reach such an agreement have failed because the security forces are afraid to enter into an agreement with the fugitives absent political top cover. He added that such an agreement would also require the fugitives to stay in one location once they have signed onto it.

16. (S) Diskin reiterated that small steps need to be taken first: "Even a journey of a hundred miles starts with a first step." The first step, he says, cannot be confidence building measures that entail unacceptable risks: "If we lift the roadblocks in Kalkiliya, I can assure you that tomorrow we will have Mohammed from Kalkiliya blowing himself up in Tel Aviv." Diskin noted that Israel's security barrier around the West Bank is not yet complete. He observed that terrorists try to get into green-line Israel through Jerusalem because the barrier around it is porous. This, he stressed, is the reason for the roadblocks along the

Jenin-Nablus-Ramallah-Jerusalem corridor. He added, "When we last lifted the roadblocks, we saw the terrorists adjust their tactics accordingly." He also characterized the roadblocks as intelligence collection points. Noting that some are permanent and others roving, he claimed that Israeli counter-surveillance at roadblocks has helped ISA to prevent terrorist attacks. Diskin added that some roadblocks are placed where they are based on ISA recommendations. In other cases, the IDF places roadblocks at locations based on ISA advice or on the IDF's own initiative: "In these cases, some of these roadblocks could (safely) be removed."

17. (S) Diskin concluded, "If the Palestinians could do something serious on security for a period of time in a certain area, then I believe I could convince my government to undertake something comparable."

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JONES